

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

January 2019



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On the New Year

By Executive Director Shawn Ryan



If the start of a new year equates new beginnings, then the opportunity to build a better agency takes on all the more meaning in 2020. The past few months have brought significant changes to GVRA. Many program employees have participated in work groups whose input has laid the foundation for improved vocational services. We have tapped into the expertise of some of our most effective providers to develop uniform standards and set clear expectations for all involved. Transition staff are planning closely with local educators to implement the very best practices of Career Pathways in a way that makes sense for students we serve.

Evidence of our positive momentum is growing across our administrative functions. I have recently hired GVRA's first Planning and Budget Director, who will address long-term deficiencies in how we actually budget and set clear goals for the agency. Our new Human Resources Director and staff are mapping out strategies so we can recruit

the very best and get them in place quickly. The Fiscal Operations team, under direction of our new Chief Financial Officer, is developing processes to ensure a seamless approach to procurement and efficient invoice payments. Our General Counsel has committed to prompt review of contracts and timely action on critical legal issues. I am confident those of you across our five programs, as well as external partners like our providers, will be pleased with the improved service that has already started and the progress that is on the way.

In the next few months, you will see even more improvements as we hire our other administrative functions back to full staff and turn our attention to better business processes and use of resources throughout the programs. In 2020, we should all commit to excellent customer service for every client whose life we touch.



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Ron Stephens



State Representative Ron Stephens (R-Savannah) represents the 164th District in the Georgia House of Representatives, where he has served for 22 years. Rep. Stephens is the chairman of the House Economic Development & Tourism Committee. He is also a member of the Appropriations, Rules and Ways and Means committees. On May 24, 2013, former Governor Nathan Deal appointed Rep. Stephens to the Georgia Tourism Foundation.

Rep. Stephens is a graduate of Armstrong State & Mercer University where he graduated with a postgraduate degree in Pharmacy. He and his wife, Janice, have two daughters, Karen and Ashlin, two grandsons, Walker Reese and James "Beau" William Dukes, IV, and one granddaughter, Ivey Carolina. The Stephenses are members of Richmond Hill Baptist Church. Rep. Stephens has spent over 38 years as a

pharmacist. Before being elected to the House, Rep. Stephens earned a seat as a city councilman in Garden City. Proven to be a consensus builder who can reach across party lines, he was previously selected as the vice-chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and as a member of the Economic Development subcommittee, under a democratic majority and leadership.

Rep. Stephens was selected as the chair of the Economic Development & Tourism Committee because of his experience of 17 years in the General Assembly. He is passionate about protecting and strengthening Georgia's tourism business. He has served on the Appropriations Committee for over 20 years. Rep. Stephens is the co-author of the first floating homestead exemption in Georgia, which now applies to more than 50 taxing districts in the state and effectively freezes property taxes for the homeowner. Today, House Bill 350 is known as the "Stephens Day Bill."

He also served and was a pioneer on the original tourism study committee that led to the formation of the current Economic Development & Tourism Committee, which earned him the Leadership Award for efforts to bring non-traditional tourism industries to the state.



Way to Go!

The DAS Employee of the Month

The following nomination was submitted by Luana Cesar in the category of Customer Service:

Glenda Johnson truly deserves recognition as the Employee of the Month for her years of service as a Help Desk Analyst in the Stone Mountain Information System (IS) Department. She has solved several hundred desktop support issues with professionalism and enthusiasm.

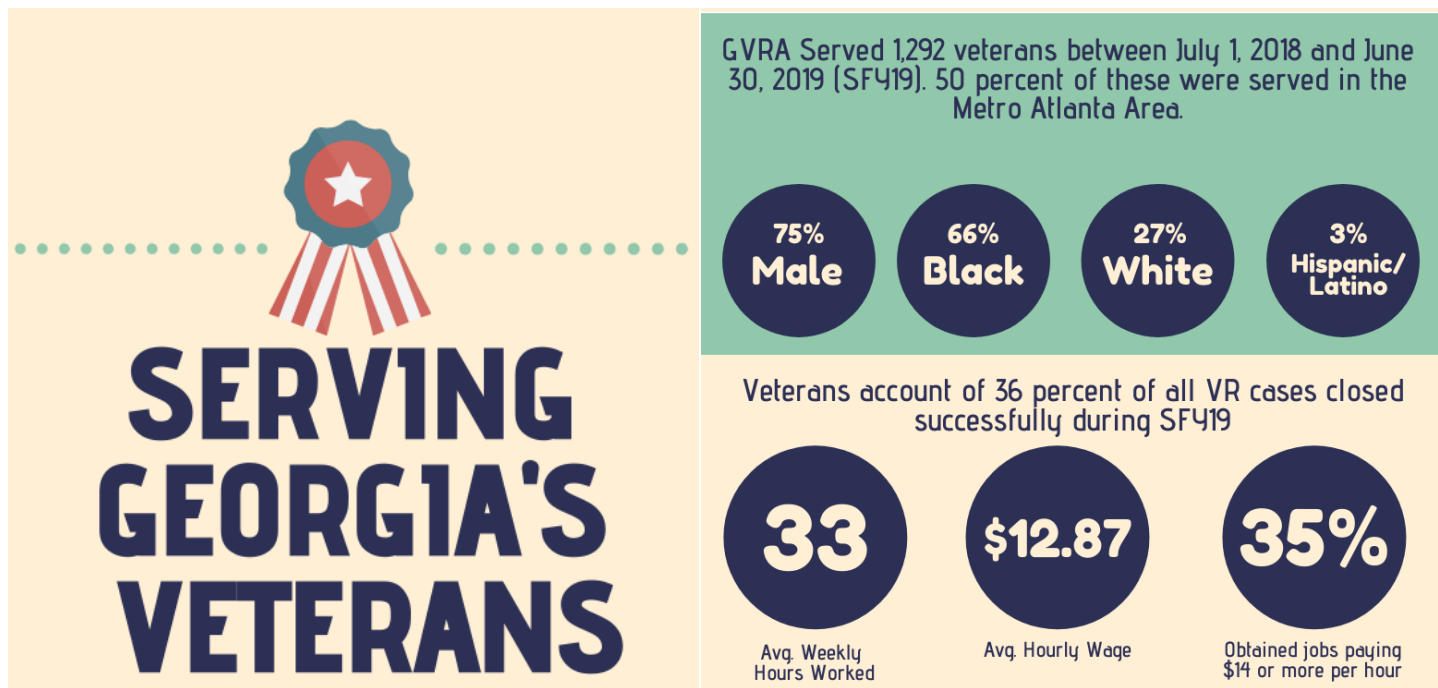
Glenda is a valuable and talented employee and brings confidence and consistency in her efforts throughout the IS department. She has taken the initiative to figure out what the department and users need and then delivered on these needs. She is dedicated and hardworking; her voice and reassuring mannerisms are a lifeline for

users. Going above and beyond the call of duty in pursuing excellence is her trademark. Her decades of faithful service and wisdom are often called upon by outside departments such as Case Control and the Professional Relations Unit. Not only does she remain relevant in her duties, but she consistently exceeds expectations.

Her laughter is contagious and reduces stress and difficulties department wide. Watching her in action over the years has been amazing. She displays excellent communication and problem solving skills daily. For these reasons and others not mentioned, I would like to nominate Glenda Johnson for Employee of the Month.

2019 Comprehensive State Needs Assessment

The following information was gathered by the University of Georgia as part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment



BEST PRACTICES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

AND WHAT THEY MEAN



Three Models

VR utilizes three models of Supported Employment to assist individuals in securing competitive integrated employment. Those are: Traditional Supported Employment, Customized Employment and Individual Placement and Supports (IPS).



Stats from State Fiscal Year 2019

JULY 1, 2018 TO JUNE 30,
2019

321 individuals successfully obtained employment through Supported Employment services, which is 18 percent of all successful closures during this time. 38 percent of these SE closures were individuals under the age of 25.



What Jobs Were They Getting?

CLOSURES WERE IN THE
FOLLOWING CATEGORIES

Office and Administrative Support
Food Preparation and Serving
Building and Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance
Transportation and Material Moving



Over \$6 Million Spent on SE

DURING SFY 2019

45 percent of this was used for Evidence Based Supported Employment (IPS), and 30 percent of this was used for supporting jobs paying above \$10/hour.



Why Supported Employment?

IT CAN CHANGE LIVES

Supported Employment is the service used to support individuals with the most significant disabilities as they secure competitive integrated employment. Supported Employment is a means by which people can be successful in employment that fits their talents, interests and abilities.

AND THIS IS WHY SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT WORKS

SERVING TRANSITION-AGED YOUTH

LOOKING AT THE NUMBERS



Stats from State Fiscal Year 2019

JULY 1, 2018 TO JUNE 30,
2019

GVRA served 13,365 individuals with disabilities under the age of 25 in SFY19, which is 46 percent of all VR consumers served during this time.



Demographics

LET'S BREAK IT DOWN
FURTHER.

Male: 61.66 percent -- Female: 38.26 percent

White: 53.1 percent -- Black: 41.4 percent
Hispanic/Latino: 7 percent -- Asian 1.4 percent
American Indian/Alaskan: 0.3 percent



What Jobs Were They Getting?

CLOSURES WERE IN THE
FOLLOWING CATEGORIES

Office and Administrative Support
Food Preparation and Serving
Sales and Related Occupations



Over \$17 million spent

DURING SFY 2019

More than \$17 million was spent in SFY19 to assist youth and young adults with disabilities in helping them obtain their career goals.



Gaining Independence

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Transition-aged youth who successfully found employment through VR during SF29 made on average \$9.50/hour and worked 29 hours a week.

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE SUCCEED IN THE WORKPLACE

Teaching Tech

Staff on Hand at Assistive Technology Conference



BEP News and Notes

Staff on Hand at Assistive Technology Conference

The BEP is excited to announce its new joint venture with Robins Air Force Base and Central Georgia Technical College. Boeing Aerospace Company recently shuttered their operation in Macon and vacated a large hanger located at the Middle Georgia Regional Airport. The hanger has since been repurposed into a training center where students participate in aircraft structural programs and learn aviation maintenance, preparing them for work at Robins or other similar locations.

The BEP was asked to provide hot food options and vending for the students. This opportunity came with a challenge since there is no on-site kitchen. The BEP

embraced the opportunity and will establish a mobile kitchen in the form of a modified food truck, which is due to be up and running come February 2020.

In addition, BEP Administrative Operations Coordinator Charlotte Walker has obtained her Georgia Certified Purchasing Manager certification (G.C.P.M.) from the State of Georgia, State Purchasing Department.

Congratulations, Charlotte!



Congrats Are In Order

Lee Brinkley Bryan Takes Home Blaze Sports Award



Transition and Residential Services Director Lee Brinkley Bryan recently received the BlazeSports America Triumph of the Human Spirit Award. She is pictured (middle, top row) next to Executive Director Shawn Ryan and Vocational Services Director Christine Fleming. On the front row is CFO Monica Bradshaw, HR Director Jennifer Statham, Education Program Specialist Sue Kiser and Lead Education Program Specialist Karla Wade.



Overcoming Challenges

One Client's Story

Joshua Williams is undaunted by challenges. As someone who, because of his cerebral palsy and cortical visual impairment, has required full care since infancy, he knows a few things about facing adversity. Being an individual who requires someone to shower, dress and transport him, as well as assist him with accommodations regarding studying, reading, writing and typing (among many other activities), he wholeheartedly appreciates the assistance and wants to make the most of his talents. He wants to give back and contribute to society.

But the road has been long, one with many winding turns. For instance, upon entering elementary school, he was placed in a self-contained classroom due to others' misconceptions about his abilities. In this isolated setting, he received no classes in basic math, reading or writing. This would play a role, he said, in his becoming an auditory learner. It was only later, while a high school student, that Joshua realized he could accomplish more than what his special education teachers expected. As a result, he decided to pursue a traditional (rather than special education) diploma.

After encountering some resistance, he was placed in classes with his peers. Joshua responded by passing every subject. (Here, and in his future classes, he required extra time to take tests, as well as studying and reading assistance at home). But, even with supports, he was still unable to pass the reading and mathematical parts of the exit exam. Not even retaking the test yielded positive results. It was only after Joshua persuaded a state legislator to become involved and remove this test-taking criteria, that he received his high school diploma. Following high school graduation, Joshua

applied to college. It was at this time that GVRA entered the picture. The agency, with Lisa A. Jones, CRC, serving as his counselor, began to assist this young man in his efforts to find gainful employment. Services included postsecondary training assistance, counseling and guidance, job search, job placement and job follow-up.

Even with VR's aid, Joshua encountered difficulties. At East Georgia College, the first post-secondary institution he attended, difficulties such as where to sit in the classroom needed attention. Joshua also required extra time to take tests and, as previously mentioned, additional assistance at home to deal with his disabilities.

When it comes to completing school work, Joshua has always had to explore creative options. He completes his assignments on the computer. When it comes time to take tests, he is orally tested or takes quizzes on the computer. Helping him in his endeavors are his mother Mitzi, and his staff of 3 assistants. They work with him from 7:45 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. every day. His staff assists Joshua in his activities of daily living and in his academic pursuits. This includes going to classes with him, sitting behind him and taking notes for him.

Currently, Joshua is attending Georgia Southern University, majoring in interdisciplinary studies. He is on track to graduate in the spring of 2020. His counselor Lisa views him as "a strong advocate for himself" and other people with disabilities, he would like to work at Georgia Southern in the student disability office supporting new students in their college experience. He can



foresee a long future there, as he intends to help many students with challenges like those he faced. Besides this, he is even considering going on the radio, speaking about his life.

Concerning his sentiments about GVRA, Joshua exclaimed that Lisa, his counselor, was “wonderful.” Mentioning that she has worked with him since he became a VR client, Joshua pointed out that she “always lets me talk,” something he appreciates very much. Joshua feels very fortunate to have the agency work with him, he said, and he would gladly recommend GVRA to anyone with a disability who has the desire to work.



Checking All the Right Boxes

CARF Recommends RWS Accreditation

After a busy day and a half of meetings and document studies, two surveyors from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International) have recommended Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) for accreditation in comprehensive vocational evaluation services and in employee development services. The surveyors, Dianne Duncan and Marilyn Flanagan, had compliments for RWS during the summation conference on November 19. "Entering campus, the visitor knows that RWS is a special and unique place," Flanagan said. "It was really great to walk around and see all the smiling faces. You guys do great things every day."

Duncan and Flanagan were particularly impressed with the Jump Start evaluation initiative, saying the program is unique and deserves national attention. They also complimented the technology lending library and the neuro-feedback program. However, they recognized RWS's individualized service approach and collaboration between work-based learning and employment development staff as perhaps the program's greatest asset. The efforts of the RWS Campus Police Department also impressed the surveyors, who noted the ability of officers and dorm staff to evacuate all residential students in 3 minutes.

"As we walked around campus," Flanagan added, "we noticed that everyone seemed to know how their particular job contributed to the overall outcomes."

Shawn Ryan, Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) which operates RWS along with four other statutory programs, commended staff for extensive preparation for the CARF visit, as well as for their daily dedication.

"Operating a residential vocational training center requires a synchronicity of services," Ryan said. "Instructors, counselors, residential employees, building maintenance and many others all have critical roles in creating a safe and positive learning environment."

Residential and Transition Services Director Lee Brinkley Bryan thanked the entire staff for its commitment to the students. She said their passion is what has "kept the spirit of Warm Springs going for all these years."

Founded in 1966, CARF International helps rehabilitation organizations maintain best practices in services and in administration. RWS has sought and received accreditation every three years for decades.

CARF surveyors Marilyn Flanagan (center) and Dianne Duncan (second from the right) joined the RWS CARF team members for a photo following the summation conference. Team members included: Kathy Yates (left), manager of counseling and case management; Megan Steele, vocational assessment manager; Tiffany Hudson, RWS assistant director for employment services and Quardez Warrior, CARF Coordinator on the right.



Crocodile Careers

One Client Gets in Touch With His Wild Side

Justin Smith was never scared of snakes, but being unafraid doesn't mean he's unaware of their danger.

"I'm cautious around venomous snakes," he said. But that hasn't stopped him from handling them and hasn't stopped him from learning all he can about them. Justin currently works as an animal keeper at the Okefenokee Swamp Park while he finishes up his degree in biological sciences from the College of Coastal Georgia.

"I've always been more into reptiles and snakes and alligators," Justin said. "But I've always had a fascination with animals. They've always interested me, and I'm glad I can work with them."

Once he graduates, Justin said, he plans to move to Florida and hopes to work in a zoo or an animal sanctuary. To put it in plainly, Justin has a plan, and he's sticking to it. But sticking to a plan doesn't mean that plan has never changed.

In Justin's case, his plans first began changing when he was introduced to vocational rehabilitation around 2015. At that time, he was living in Jefferson, a small town northwest of Athens, where his father was a principal at a local high school. It was through that local education system that Justin was first put in contact with Rebecca Williamson, his VR counselor.

When he first met Rebecca, Justin was working through an Associate's degree in applied science and business administrative technology. After graduating, Justin worked with Rebecca to find a job, and soon, he began work at Baker and Taylor, a nationwide book distributor. After working there for several years, Justin followed his father to Blackshire, and that's when his plans

changed even more..

"I had been to the Okefenokee Swamp Park, only visiting, but I knew I liked it, and knew that I wanted to start volunteering there," he said.

And that's what he did.

Initially, his duties were limited to feeding the animals and cleaning their cages. After he proved adept at that, he was asked to assist the handlers with the animal demonstrations at the parks. It soon became clear that Justin was a valuable member of the team, and he was hired part time. Now, he acts as animal handler himself, giving visitors an up-close look at some of the creatures that call the swamp home.

On the whole, Justin said, he wouldn't be where he is today without the support and assistance of both Rebecca and VR. Because now, he said, he has a plan, and he's sticking to it.

"I'm excited about the future," he said. "I know what I want to do, and that feels good."



Happy Trails!

Field Services Director Lauren Knox Retires

When Lauren Knox first started working at GVRA (when it was known as Rehabilitation Services), she had no idea she would retire from the agency 30 years later. In fact, when she first came on board in September of 1989, she knew her time likely had an end date. She was hired to do billing for a federal grant—her undergraduate degree being in business—and she knew the grant would likely not last forever.

Four years after being Lauren was hired, funding for the grant was cancelled, and Lauren knew she had to go back to the drawing board. But she did not have to start from square one. Her time working in the field of vocational rehabilitation helped her realize that she really wanted to become a counselor. So she earned her Master's Degree in Certified Rehabilitation Counseling at Columbus State University, and one year and nine months later, she was hired back on with GVRA as a counselor.

"I believe things happen for a reason, and I believe coming to VR was one of those things. It has been my passion ever since," Lauren said. "Being able to help people who have challenges is very fulfilling work. Helping people to be independent and self-sufficient just feels good. It is an honor to be able to participate in that."

In September 2005, Lauren was promoted to the position of Unit Manager, a change she said allowed her to use the skills she had developed over the years.

"It was a change of pace, but I liked it. I enjoyed the counselor role, but I have always loved learning and wanted to learn more about how the agency functions and why we do what we do at the administrative level," Lauren said. "I also enjoy being able to help other members of the team to understand

why we do what we do and to get better as a team."

From there, she rose to the position of Director of Field Services for the South Quadrant in 2014, and she was promoted to Director of Field Services for the entire state in 2017.

"We truly appreciate Lauren's dedication throughout her 30 years of service. She has worked hard on behalf of Georgians with disabilities and mentored many of her VR coworkers," said GVRA Executive Director Shawn Ryan. "We wish Lauren all the best as she begins this next chapter." Lauren said she plans to spend her retirement spending time with her family. Even then, she said, GVRA and its employees will always hold a special place in her heart.

"I have worked with so many awesome people over the years at every level," she said. "The work we do is so fulfilling, and it has been such a privilege to do it."



Merry and Bright

Scenes from the RWS Christmas Parade



RWS staff members every year kick off the Christmas season by hosting their annual golf cart Christmas parade!



What to Know This Session

The Legislative Session is Underway

In mid January, lawmakers convened in Georgia's Golden Dome for the final year in the state's 2019-2020 biennial legislative session. That means a bill that was introduced but not passed last session in 2019 could have another chance to become law this year. However, if the legislation fails to pass both chambers by Day 40, it would have to be reintroduced the following session.

Every year, we track those bills that hold the potential to impact Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, our clients and the disability community as a whole. Session always starts on the second Monday in January, and legislators meet for 40 nonconsecutive days.

Tracking a Bill through the General Assembly
A bill is introduced by a legislator in either chamber (State Senate or State House). It is then sent to its respective standing committee to be vetted. If the committee favorably reports it out, it will then go to the entire chamber body for a floor vote. Should the bill pass by a constitutional majority, it will then go to the other chamber for consideration. There, it will go through the same process; through committee and then a floor vote. If the bill makes it through both chambers successfully by day 40, also known as Sine Die, the next stop is the Governor's desk. The Governor may sign the legislation or do nothing, and the bill becomes law. If the Governor vetoes the bill, it dies unless two-thirds of members of each house override the veto.

Agency Legislative Contact

Chuck Stone recently assumed a new role as Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency's Legislative Liaison. Previously, Chuck served as Customer Care Supervisor in the Vocational Rehabilitation program. He has

been with the agency for five and half years.

Please be reminded that all legislative questions must be directed to the Executive Director and/or Legislative Liaison, who are the only individuals authorized to speak to General Assembly members on GVRA issues without prior authorization. Chuck Stone may be reached at Chuck.Stone@gvs.ga.gov.

2019 Legislative Recap

The bills below are legislation we tracked last session that have since been signed into law.

Senate Bill 48- Effective date- July 1, 2019-
In an effort to recognize and address dyslexia at an early age, local schools systems now have to utilize, through response to intervention process, dyslexia screening tools in grades Kindergarten through 3rd grade.

House Bill 79- Effective date May 2, 2019-
To provide that blind persons shall not be discriminated against by the courts, Department of Human Services, or a child-placing agency in matters relating to child custody, guardianship, foster care, visitation, placement, or adoption.
History: In the past people who are blind report discrimination in issues of guardianship. This bill represented an effort to combat unfair custody decisions, by mandating a preponderance of proof stating that an individual is not capable of ensuring the wellbeing of a child.

House Bill 62- "Margie's Law" - Effective date July 1, 2019 – This bill requires physicians to notify women with dense breast tissue after a mammogram. The notification would read as follows: "Your



mammogram shows that your breast tissue is dense. Dense breast tissue is very common and is not abnormal. However, dense breast tissue can make it more difficult to detect cancer through a mammogram. Also, dense breast tissue may increase your risk for breast cancer. This information about the result of your mammogram is given to you to increase your awareness. Use this information to talk with your health care provider about whether other supplemental tests in addition to your mammogram may be appropriate for you, based on your individual risk. A report of your results was sent to your ordering physician. If you are self-referred, a report of your results was sent to you in addition to this summary."

House Bill 64- "Protecting Military Children Act" – Effective date July 1, 2019 – This bill requires child welfare agencies to make efforts to determine whether a parent or guardian of a child who is the subject of abuse allegations is on active duty military; if so, the agency is to report such allegations to the military installation family advocacy program.

2020 Legislation (thus far)

Senate Bill 284 – This bill would allow state and local charter schools, who serve over age populations, to accept students up to age 20 until September 1 of year of enrollment. This shall specifically include students who have reenrolled after dropping out and who are married, parents, or pregnant. Special education students would also be eligible for enrollment in appropriate education programs through age 21 or until they receive high school or special education diplomas.

House Bill 15 – This bill, if passed, will require any housing authority created after implementation of the new law to create policies granting housing preferences to veterans who are homeless individuals. This bill is currently in the State House of Representatives.

House Bill 60 – This bill would classify dependent children of active duty military members as in-state for purposes of tuition within the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia. The bill is currently in the State House of Representatives.

House Bill 123 – This bill would move State Workforce Development Board from the Georgia Department of Economic Development to the Georgia Department of Labor. This bill is currently in the State House of Representatives.

Capitol Events

Easter Seals of Southern Georgia Day at the Capitol is Friday, January 17.



**Change is the law of life.
And those who look
only to the past or present
are certain to miss the future.**

~ John F. Kennedy

Why We Do What We Do

We all have off days. Maybe the weather is dreary or you're just feeling not so great. It happens. When I'm feeling like this, though, I take a moment and reflect on the clients we serve, and it puts everything else in perspective. This newsletter features several client stories, and I hope these stories inspire you to continue the mission of helping individuals with disabilities across the state of Georgia.

I want to, as always, thank everyone who helped make this newsletter possible. If there's ever anything you'd like included in a future issue, please shoot me a line at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov.

John Peyton Boan, Communications Manager

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